**Discourse markers**

A discourse marker is a word or expression which we use to show the structure of a piece of discourse, whether spoken or written. They can signal when a speaker wants to go on to a new topic (O.K., right …..), give his opinion (I suppose…) or say something the listener might not want to hear (Actually…). Foreign language learners may have problems using these markers correctly. They are often not ‘taught’ in English courses. In conversation, new discourse markers are popularized by native speaker teenagers and if non-native speakers emulate these, they may sound comical if they do not get them exactly right or are from a different age group.

**Identifying the function**

Look at the functions below. Read the four excerpts and match the function with the excerpt.  
  
To help you, the discourse markers have been written in bold. (Note that there are only 3 excerpts, so one of the functions is not used).   
  
Functions:   
1. Indicates that critical remarks (or a negative opinion) will follow   
2. Indicates an alternative point of view   
3. Indicates a sequence of steps to be taken   
4. Indicates a change of topic

     (Excerpt from a conversation between a lecturer and a student)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lecturer: | **Quite frankly**, I’m a bit disappointed with your attitude this term. |
| Student: | Er… what do you mean? |
| Lecturer: | **Well, I’m afraid** you’ve not put in much effort and er… **how can I put this**… it’s had a bad effect on the others. |
| Student: | Oh. |
| Lecturer: | **Actually, what I’m trying to say** is you’ve failed this course. |

Function: ****   
  
B.    (Magazine article giving dietary advice)

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| Make sure you eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vedge a day. **Apart from** the antioxidants they contain, their high fibre helps protect against bowel disease. You should **also** include more red fruit in your diet as it contains lycopene, which protects against heart disease. **Another** key antioxidant is the mineral selenium, found in shellfish and offal. **Finally**, to keep your brain sharp, take Omega 3 fish oils. |

Function: ****   
  
C.    (This extract comes from an article about buying property.)

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| Most experts advise adding 10% to your budget to cover taxes, fees and unexpected expenses.**However**, making generalized assumptions of the cost is dangerous. Underestimating the costs could mean you have to find extra money once you are committed. You might well get carried away by the estate agents’ patter, but **rather** you should be realistic. Broad percentage figures are **simply**not good enough and aren’t actually necessary, because a good agent should give you an accurate breakdown of the costs involved. |

**Formal and informal discourse markers**

In the box below, there are a selection of discourse markers commonly used in spoken discourse. The sentences contain examples of their formal equivalents (in bold) which are usually found in a written context. Replace the formal markers in the sentences with informal markers from the box. You may need to change the punctuation. Two of the informal markers are redundant, to make the task more challenging.

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| so | right | what’s more | on the other hand |
| actually | well | | all the same |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. | The weather conditions were not good for the cross-country event; **in spite of this**, all the runners enjoyed themselves immensely. |
|  | informal marker: |
|  |  |
| 2. | The supervisor suggested that the staff work overtime for extra pay; **alternatively**, the company could employ temporary staff. |
|  | informal marker: |
|  |  |
| 3. | Raw fish is not to my taste; **in fact** I cannot eat it at all. |
|  | informal marker: |
|  |  |
| 4. | There is a danger of wild snakes on this path. **Consequently**, you should always carry a torch. |
|  | informal marker: |
|  |  |
| 5. | The pine forests and mountains of Bhutan are very beautiful. **In addition to this**, the Bhutanese people are very welcoming. |
|  | informal marker: |

Source: http://webapp.ln.edu.hk

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